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PROGRAM Eyewitness News

STATION WDVM TV

DATE June 23, 1982 6:00 PM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Disclosing Undercover Agents

GORDON PETERSON: President Reagan says CIA employees are the eyes and the ears of the free world. Today the President signed legislation making it illegal for people to disclose the name of American spies.

Eyewitness News correspondent Kent Jarrell reports.

KENT JARRELL: Inside CIA headquarters, away from cameras and reporters, President Reagan talked to several hundred undercover agents. Outside, before a hillside full of other employees, less sensitive to being photographed, the President said the CIA is the trip-wire against the forces of repression and tyranny, and he urged special care because the Soviet Union is suffering from internal decay.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: History shows that it is precisely when totalitarian regimes begin to decay from within, it is precisely when they feel the first real stirrings of domestic unrest that they seek to reassure their own people of their vast and unchallengeable power through imperialistic expansion or foreign adventure. So the era ahead of us is one that will see grave challenges and be fraught with danger.

JARRELL: Then the President, to applause, signed the agent protection law which calls for a penalty of up to ten years in jail and up to fifty thousand dollars in fines for persons disclosing the names of US spies.

The American Civil Liberties Union is offering to help anyone prosecuted under the law, saying the law is an infringement on the constitutional right of free speech.

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The President said the legislation is only aimed at indecent people, and is a vote of confidence in the CIA by the American people.

PRESIDENT REAGAN: It's law.

JARRELL: And in another attempt to keep secrets secret, photographers were told not to take pictures outside the area the ceremony was held in.

The President's visit to the CIA was an obvious morale boost, the President saying a decade of neglect and over-zealous criticism of the CIA is now over, that the nation's intelligence agencies are now being rebuilt.

Kent Jarrell, Eyewitness News, at CIA headquarters.